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to tame El Terrible

Poets who reported on
the obscenity of war

Millennium
Countdown
73
days

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Hopes of an early end to the nurses' strike dealt a blow as talks break down

Serious difficulties bar way to a direct meeting

John Downing
Dublin
Carl O'Brien
Cork

HOPES of an early end to the nurses' strike were dealt a blow last night. Talks between Government officials and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions ended inconclusively with officials conceding that serious difficulties remain before nurses and employers can begin direct talks.

The discussions had been aimed at finding a way of opening direct negotiations between the two sides in the dispute, but they have been adjourned until later this afternoon.

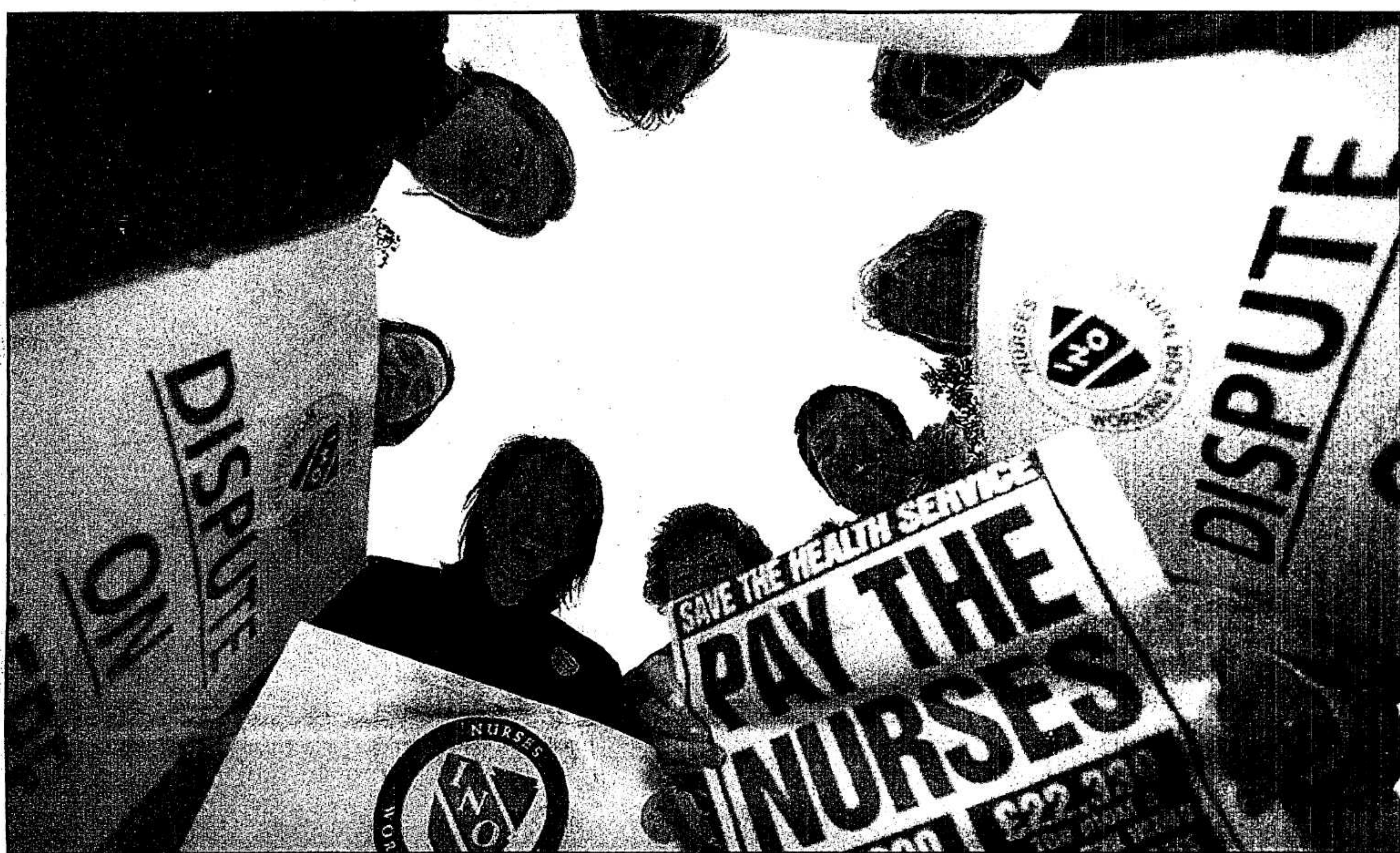
"There are significant difficulties in agreeing a process that will stand a realistic chance of being successful. However they will continue to try to identify a process within the social partnership structure by which this dispute could be resolved," a Government spokesman said.

ICTU officials are consulting with the Nursing Alliance leaders and Government representatives from the Department of the Taoiseach and Finance are consulting with their senior ministers.

The Nursing Alliance said it was available for talks at any time and added that if they began immediately, the strike could be over within days.

Des Kavanagh of the Psychiatric Nurses Association said major issues needed to be addressed, but if they were tackled the strike might not extend into a second week. But he warned nurses to be prepared for three weeks on the picket lines if the obstacles were not overcome.

"There will be tough negotiations ahead. The key area we'll be facing is incremental pay increases for nurses.



Nurses on the picket line at Cork University Hospital yesterday.

Picture: Gerard McCarthy/News-Pics

Other issues up for discussion include allowances, differentials and premium pay. Trying to get something that will be seen as acceptable by the whole profession is the real challenge," he said.

Day one of the first nationwide nurses strike saw the cancellation of all non-emergency surgery and out-patient clinics in 46 acute hospitals. An estimated 7,000 appointments were cancelled yesterday while more than 3,000 emergency admissions were taken in by

acute hospitals. Unions insisted that all patients would be in safe hands throughout the dispute, however the Irish Patients' Association warned that the risks posed by the dispute were inhumane and unacceptable, and called on the Government and unions to begin talks immediately.

Service is as usual in private hospitals such as the Blackrock Clinic, Bon Secours, St Vincent's Private Hospital and the Mater

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Private Hospital. Nurses in these hospitals are not going on strike. In the Dail Health Minister Brian Cowen went out of his way

to be as conciliatory as possible. He said he had never suggested the Nursing Alliance should "simply take or leave the Labour Court findings."

Mr Cowen said the Government hoped the peace findings could be accepted but negotiations could then move on to other issues aimed at re-casting nursing employment conditions and pay.

The Nursing Alliance is believed to be under strain at the negotiating table following rejection

of a formula to end the dispute and address nurses' pay and conditions earlier this week.

Senior union officials confirmed that a formula had been reached by stretching the partnership agreement to its limits, however it was rejected by SIPTU and IMPACT.

They also expressed concern that Nursing Alliance chairman Liam Doran had been on the receiving end of stinging criticism from unnamed Alliance sources.

Dispute ends as workers support deal

by Gillian O'Neill

ELECTRICIANS and plumbers last night voted in favour of settlement proposals as the dispute at Waterford general hospitals was finally resolved.

The South Eastern Health Board also accepted the proposals. Pickets have been lifted and non-medical staff are returning to work this morning.

The dispute had seriously affected services at Waterford Regional Hospital and two others in the city, but both sides now say they are happy at the outcome.

Nurses did not set up a picket line yesterday at Waterford Regional Hospital — because other striking workers had got there before them.

Instead nurses provided extra emergency cover at Waterford Regional Hospital where the care assistants are on unofficial strike. Craft workers at the hospital have been on official strike since last week and the care workers will not cross their picket line.

So, while banners were in abundance at the strike-ridden hospital there was none about the nurses' grievances. The 520 striking nurses had gone back to the wards to cover for the care assistants.

Over £1m cash seized in major border money-laundering scam

by Elaine Keogh

A £50m money laundering scam linked to major drugs seizures in Dublin, Castleblayney and Balbriggan in the last year, and uncovered following the killing of a drugs baron has been shut down in a cross-border security operation.

During the organised searches gardai seized over £1m cash in punts and sterling. The total figure believed to have been laundered in the scam is expected to rise after gardai examine documentation seized at the same time as the cash.

Bureaux de changes offices, private homes, boats and business premises — including those of solicitors and accountants — were searched. One of the bureau de changes raided was next door to Dromad garda station, within yards of the Louth border with Northern Ireland.

The Gardai and RUC arrested eight people in early morning raids — six in County Louth and one in Crossmaglen, Co Armagh. The arrests follow a two year investigation into money laundering, drug

trafficking and illegal banking in Newry and Dundalk.

The investigation began after the murder in Drogheda of Newry-based drugs baron Paddy Farrell in 1997.

At the time of his death Farrell was believed to be one of the major drug traffickers in Ireland, but two other people from Newry quickly moved in to replace him.

Security force sources confirmed that up to £50 million, the proceeds of drug trafficking, may have been processed through the scam. One bureaux de change was closed after it was searched.

The investigation was linked to major drugs hauls, including the biggest ever heroin seizure in the State in Balbriggan earlier this year, and the seizure of 25 guns and cannabis worth £7.5 million in Castleblayney last December.

One hundred gardai from the Criminal Assets Bureau and the Criminal Bureau of Fraud Investigation led the investigation in the Republic.

The RUC had 150 officers involved in the operation including members of its special-

ised financial investigation unit. RUC officers were flown by helicopter to locations near Newry for yesterday's co-ordinated searches.

Vast quantities of documents, money and equipment were seized by both forces and a number of people were arrested in the Dundalk area. They were held under the Money Laundering Act and detained under section 2 of the Drug Trafficking Act which allows them to be detained for up to seven days.

One suspect was detained in Crossmaglen where his home had been under surveillance for weeks.

He is suspected to be a major player in the laundering of 'dirty money' from cross-border crime, including drug trafficking.

A Customs source revealed that further swoops were expected in relation to illegal smuggling operations involving millions of pounds.

Documents seized on the "money trail" swoops will be examined by special financial investigators.

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Party-mad Irish ready for big Millennium splash

by Fionnán Sheahan



THE party-mad Irish will be celebrating the Millennium in a more thrifty manner than our foreign counterparts.

An international survey carried out by pollsters MORI on behalf of Jameson Irish Whiskey, shows Irish people will fork out average £243 per person in recognition of the landmark new year.

The Jameson International Millennium Survey shows citizens of London, New York and Paris will be splashing out far more than the Irish on the midnight revelries.

The old fashioned trait of leaving it all to the last minute is expected to be clearly in evidence.

Supermarkets and other retail outlets look set for a massive clear out on Thursday, December 30. Over a

quarter of the population (28%) say they plan to leave it until almost the last minute to make arrangements to mark the event.

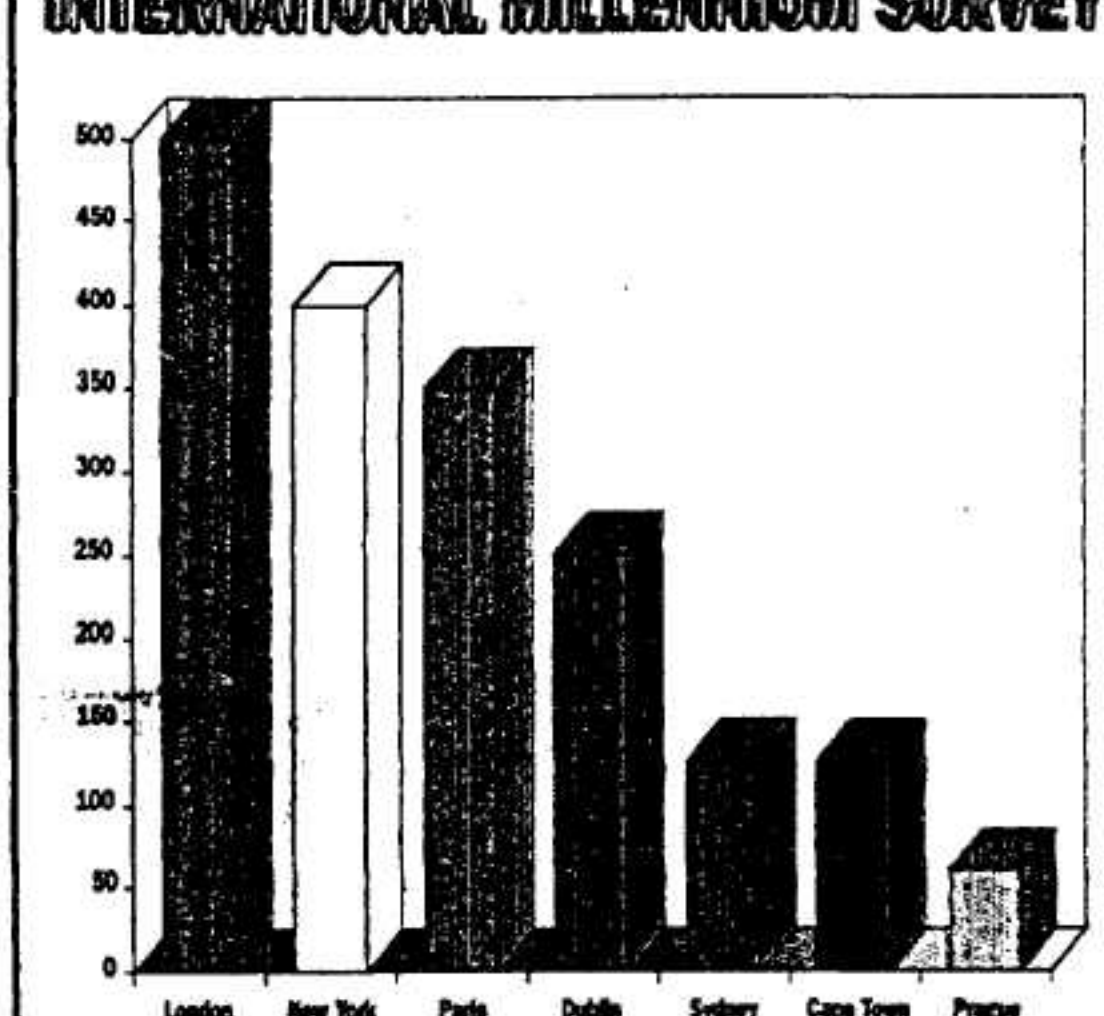
But where exactly are we going to get all the cash for the New Year's spree? At any given moment there is about £3 billion in cash in circulation. This figure would typically go up about 10% over a normal Christmas.

The amount of cash flowing begins to climb around the start of December and peaks around the 21st or 22nd of the month, as people get their Xmas present shopping done.

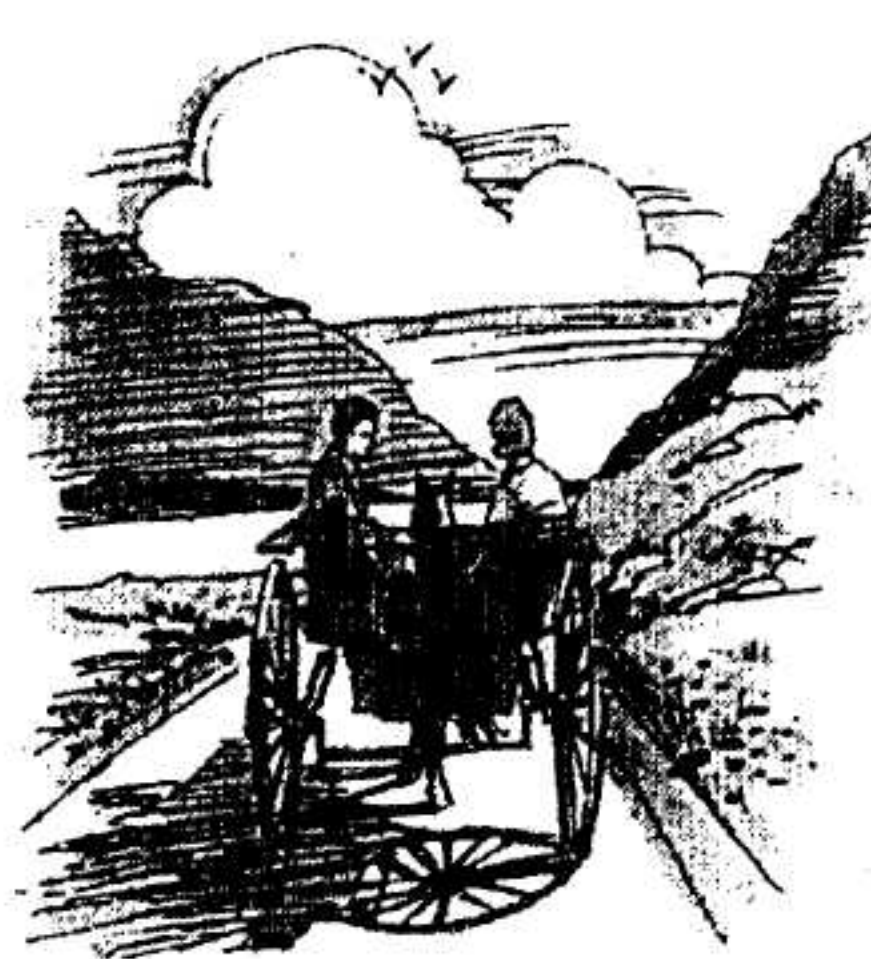
This year with the banks only open for one day between Christmas Eve and January 4, 2000, ATM machines will be under even more pressure as the main source of cash.

The Central Bank say there's no need to worry. "We have plenty of money so we don't anticipate any problem. Any level of demand, we can happily meet," a spokesperson said. We'll just have to take their word for it.

INTERNATIONAL MILLENNIUM SURVEY



(Chart shows in punts the average amount people plan to spend on Millennium celebrations)



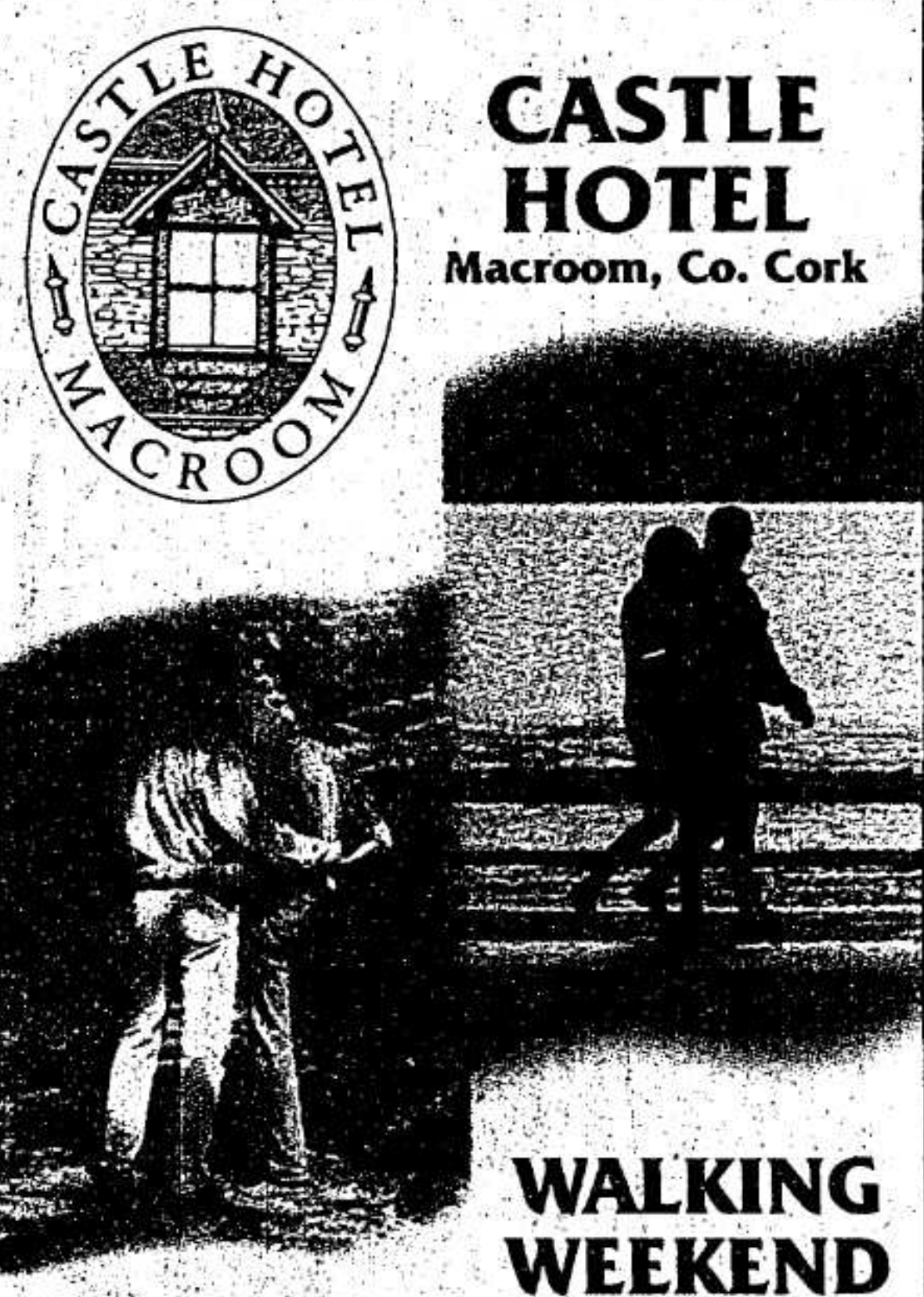
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